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Beecher - Woman's Duty to Vote - 1867

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WOMAN'S DUTY TO VOTE.

SPEECH BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER,

AT THE ELEVENTH NATIONAL

WOMANS RIGHT'S CONVENTION,

HELD IN

NEW YORK, MAY 10, 1866.

It may be asked why, at such a time as this, when the attention of the whole nation is concentrated upon the reconstruction of our States, we should intrude a new and advanced question. I have been asked, "Why not wait for the settlement of the question that now fills the minds of men? Why divert and distract their thoughts?" I answer, Because the question is one and the same. We are not now discussing merely the question of the vote for the African, or of his status as a new-born citizen. That is a fact which compels us to discuss the whole underlying question of government. That is the case in court. But when the judge shall have given his decision, that decision will cover the whole question of civil society, and the relations of every individual in it as a factor, an agent, an actor.

Now, if you look back, you shall see that the history of the development of man for the last thousand years—before that, but more obviously and noticeably since—has been collection for the sake of distribution. In order to guard interest against brute force, it was needful that guilds, and franchises, and fraternities, and professions should be es-

tablished. Just as when we light a candle in flaring winds we take every precaution, not to hide the light, but to protect it until it has strength to burn without protection, and then let it stand to give light to all that are in the house, so it was necessary for law to protect itself. It was needful for medicine, too, as it were, to intrench itself and ward off empyrics. It was needful for various mechanical trades to defend themselves. And it has been said that these were the bulwarks and the very advanced guards of popular democratic liberty. But so soon as, by guilds, and franchises, and fraternities, and professions, a principle had become so strong that it needed no longer to be protected, it then had worn out its time, and become a kind of aristocracy. And in our day the great distributive tendency has set in. The principle of democracy is so well established now that learning is not confined to a learned class; medicine is not confined to the medical profession; law is not confined to lawyers; and the ministration of the gospel, thank God, is not confined to ministers of the gospel. Everywhere it is becoming more and more acknowledged or apparent that the functions that used to be given to men of professions are becoming part and parcel of the right of every citizen who shows himself capable of exercising those functions. It needs now no reformation, no convention, to teach us that a man may take the Word of God in his hand, and go down into any street, and preach the gospel to every living creature. Once it would have required a man to make his peace with a civil magistrate to do that; for only the hand of ordination was supposed to give a man the right to preach. But now that is over, almost without discussion. It is not now thought necessary for a man, if he knows the law, to consult a lawyer. A man has a right to be healthy without a doctor, and to step aside, if he pleases, from the methods which have been prescribed by the schools of medicine. A mother is better than many a doctor that is called to attend the child; and I think that nurses will one

day be considered the best and chiefest of doctors. Good doctors already consider themselves as but men standing between officious friends and the patient to keep off medicine. And the time will come, has come, when any man may enter, by the simple right of capacity to do it, into any calling, profession, or business in life. There was a time when, in some lands, if the father was a cooper, the son must be a cooper too. There was a time when, if a man was born in a barrel, he must live in a barrel all his life! There was a time when a man felt as much bound to follow the profession that his father did, as a man, being born a man, feels bound to continue a man, or a woman, being born a woman, feels bound to continue a woman. Now that is changed. Christian civilization, the progress of democratic ideas, is making itself felt everywhere. Men are scholars, without belonging to a scholastic class. Men are practitioners in every one of the profesions, without belonging to the professional class. Men have a right to be statesmen by virtue of their citizenship. There is more power to-day in one citizen of Massachusetts than at any one time there was in a score of English nobles. These changes are going on by reason of the working of this grand democratic element. All the interests of society are experiencing a change; and society itself, in its structure, is also experiencing a change.

All the world over, the question to-day is, Who has a right to construct law, and to administer law? Russia—gelid, frigid Russia—cannot escape the question. Yea, he that sits on the Russian throne has proved himself a better democrat than any of us all, and is giving to-day more evidence of a genuine love of God, and of its partner emotion, love to man, in enfranchising thirty million serfs, than many a proud democrat of America has ever given. (Applause.) And the question of emancipation in Russia is only the preface to the next question, which doubtless he as clearly as any of us foresees—namely, the question of

is there in history, what is there in physiology, what is there in experience, that shall say to this tendency, marking the line of sex; "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther?" I roll the argument off from my shoulders, and I challenge the man that stands with me, beholding that the world-thought to-day is the emancipation of the citizen's power and the preparation by education of the citizen for that power, and objects to extending the right of citizenship to every human being, to give me the reasons why. (Applause.) To-day this nation is exercising its conscience on the subject of suffrage for the African. I have all the time favored that: not because he was an African, but because he was a man; because this right of voting, which is the symbol of everything else in civil power, inheres in every human being. But I ask you, to-day, "Is it safe to bring in a million of black men to vote, and not safe to bring in your mother, your wife, and your sister to vote?" (Applause.) This ought ye to have done, and to have done quickly, and not to have left the other undone. (Renewed applause.)

To-day, politicians of every party, especially on the eve of an election, are in favor of the briefest and most expeditious citizenizing of the Irishmen. I have great respect for Irishmen—when they do not attempt to carry on war! (Laughter.) The Irish Fenian movement is a ludicrous phenomenon past all laughing at. Bombarding England from the shores of America! (Great laughter.) Paper pugnation! Oratorical destroying! But when wind-work is the order of the day, commend me to Irishmen! (Renewed laughter.) And yet I am in favor of Irishmen voting. Just so soon as they give pledge that they come to America, in good faith, to abide here as citizens, and forswear the old allegiance, and take on the new, I am in favor of their voting. Why? Because they have learned our Constitution? No; but because voting teaches. The vote is a schoolmaster. They will learn our laws, and learn our Con-

stitution, and learn our customs ten times quicker when the responsibility of knowing these things is laid upon them, than when they are permitted to live in carelessness respecting them. And this nation is so strong that it can stand the incidental mischiefs of thus teaching the wild rabble that emigration throws on our shores for our good and upbuilding. We are wise enough, and we have educational force enough, to carry these ignorant foreigners along with us. We have attractions that will draw them a thousand times more toward us than they can draw us toward them.

And yet, while I take this broad ground, that no man, even of the Democratic party (I make the distinction because a man may be a democrat and be ashamed of the party, and a man may be of the party and not know a single principle of democracy), should be debarred from voting, I ask, is an Irishman just landed, unwashed and uncombed, more fit to vote than a woman educated in our common schools? Think of the mothers and daughters of this land, among whom are teachers, writers, artists, and speakers. What a throng could we gather if we should from all the West call our women that as educators are carrying civilization there! Thousands upon thousands there are of women that have gone forth from the educational institutions of New England to carry light and knowledge to other parts of our land. Now, place this great army of refined and cultivated women on the one side, and on the other side the rising cloud of emancipated Africans, and in front of them the great emigrant band of the Emerald Isle, and is there force enough in our government to make it safe to give to the African and the Irishman the franchise? There is. We shall give it to them. (Applause.) And will our force all fail, having done that? And shall we take the fairest and best part of our society; those to whom we owe it that we ourselves are civilized; our teachers; our companions; those to whom we go for

counsel in trouble more than to any others; those to whom we trust everything that is dear to ourselves—our children's welfare, our household, our property, our name and reputation, and that which is deeper, our inward life itself, that no man may mention to more than one—shall we take them and say, "They are not, after all, fit to vote where the Irishman votes, and where the African votes?" I am scandalized when I hear men talk in the way that men do talk—men that do not think.

If, therefore, you refer to the initial sentence, and ask me why I introduce this subject to-day, when we are already engaged on the subject of suffrage, I say, This is the greatest development of the suffrage question. It is more important that woman should vote than that the black man should vote. It is important that he should vote, that the principle may be vindicated, and that humanity may be defended; but it is important that woman should vote, not for her sake. She will derive benefit from voting; but it is not on a selfish ground that I claim the right of suffrage for her. It is God's growing and least disclosed idea of a true human society that man and woman should not be divorced in political affairs any more than they are in religious and social affairs. I claim that woman should vote because society will never know its last estate and true glory until you accept God's edict and God's command—long raked over and covered in the dust—until you bring it out, and lift it up, and read this one of God's Ten Commandments, written, if not on stone, yet in the very heart and structure of mankind, *Let those that God joined tog ther not be put asunder.* (Applause.)

When men converse with me on the subject of suffrage, or the vote, it seems to me that the terminology withdraws their mind from the depth and breadth of the case to the mere instruments. Many of the objections that are urged against woman's voting are objections against the mechanical and physical act of suffrage. It is true that all the forces

of society, in their final political deliverance, must needs be born through the vote, in our structure of government. In England it is not so. It was one of the things to be learned there that the unvoting population on any question in which they are interested and united are more powerful than all the voting population or legislation. The English Parliament, if they believed to-day that every working man in Great Britain staked his life on the issues of universal suffrage, would not dare a month to deny it. For when a nation's foundations are on a class of men that do not vote, and its throne stands on forces that are coiled up and liable at any time to break forth to its overthrow, it is a question whether it is safe to provoke the exertion of those forces or not. With us, where all men vote, government is safe; because, if a thing is once settled by a fair vote, we will go to war rather than to give it up. As when Lincoln was elected, if an election is valid, it must stand. In such a nation as this, an election is equivalent to a divine decree, and irreversible. But in Great Britain an election means, not the will of the people, but the will of rulers and a favored class, and there is always under them a great wronged class, that, if they get stirred up by the thought that they are wronged, will burst out with an explosion such that not the throne, nor parliament, nor the army, nor the exchequer can withstand the shock. And they wisely give way to the popular will when they can no longer resist it without running too great a risk. They oppose it as far as it is safe to do so, and then jump on and ride it. And you will see them astride of the vote, if the common people want it. But in America it is not so. The vote with us is so general that there is no danger of insurrection, and there is no danger that the government will be ruined by a wronged class that lies coiled up beneath it. When we speak of the vote here, it is not the representative of a class, as it is in England, worn like a star, or garter, saying, "I have the king's favor or the government's promise

of honor." Voting with us is like breathing. It belongs to us as a common blessing. He that does not vote is not a citizen with us.

It is not the vote that I am arguing, except that that is the outlet. What I am arguing, when I argue that woman should vote, is that she should do all things back of that which the vote means and enforces. She should be a nursing mother to human society. It is a plea that I make, that woman should feel herself called to be interested not alone in the household, not alone in the church, not alone in just that neighborhood in which she resides, but in the sum total of that society to which she belongs; and that she should feel that her duties are not discharged until they are commensurate with the definition which our Saviour gave in the parable of the good Samaritan. I argue, not woman's right to vote; I argue woman's *duty to discharge citizenship.* (Applause.) I say that more and more the great interests of human society in America are such as need the peculiar genius that God has given to woman. The questions that are to fill up our days are not forever to be mere money questions. Those will always constitute a large part of politics; but not so large a portion as hitherto. We are coming to a period when it is not merely to be a scramble of fierce and belluine passions in the strife for power and ambition. Human society is yet to discuss questions of work and the workman. Down below privilege lie the masses of men. More men, a thousand times, feel every night the ground, which is their mother, than feel the stars and the moon far up in the atmosphere of favor. As when Christ came the great mass carpeted the earth, instead of lifting themselves up like trees of Lebanon, so now and here the great mass of men are men that have nothing but their hands, their heads, and their good stalwart hearts, as their capital. The millions that come from abroad come that they may have light and power, and lift their children up out of ignorance, to where they themselves could not reach

with the tip of their fingers. And the great question of to-day is, How shall work find leisure, and in leisure knowledge and refinement? And this question is knocking at the door of legislation. And is there a man who does not know, that when questions of justice and humanity are blended, woman's instinct is better than man's judgment? From the moment a woman takes the child into her arms, God makes her the love-magistrate of the family; and her instincts and moral nature fit her to adjudicate questions of weakness and want. And when society is on the eve of adjudicating such questions as these, it is a monstrous fatuity to exclude from them the very ones that, by nature, and training, and instinct, are best fitted to legislate and to judge.

For the sake, then, of such questions as these, that have come to their birth, I feel it to be women's *duty* to act in public affairs. I do not stand here to plead for your *rights*. Rights compared with duties, are insignificant—are mere baubles—are as the bow on your bonnet. It seems to me that the voice of God's providence to you to-day is, "Oh messenger of mine, where are the words that I sent you to speak? Whose dull, dead ear has been raised to life by that vocalization of heaven, that was given to you more than to any other one?" Man is sub-base. A thirty-two feet six-inch pipe is he. But what is an organ played with the feet, if all the upper part is left unused? The flute, the hautboy, the finer trumpet stops, all those stops that minister to the intellect, the imagination, and the higher feelings—these must be drawn, and the whole organ played from top to bottom! (Applause.)

More than that, there are now coming up for adjudication public questions of education. And who, by common consent, is the educator of the world? Who has been? Schools are to be of more importance than railroads—not to undervalue railroads. Books and newspapers are to be more vital and powerful than exchequers and banks—not

to undervalue exchequers and banks. In other words, as society ripens, it has to ripen in its three departments, in the following order: First, in the animal; second, in the social; and third, in the spiritual and moral. We are entering the last period, in which the questions of politics are to be more and more moral questions. And I invoke those whom God made to be peculiarly conservators of things moral and spiritual to come forward and help us in that work, in which we shall falter and fail without woman. We shall never perfect human society without her offices and her ministration. We shall never round out the government, or public administration, or public policies, or politics itself, until you have mixed the elements that God gave to us in society—namely, the powers of both men and women. (Applause.) I, therefore, charge my countrywomen with this *duty* of taking part in public affairs in the era in which justice, and humanity, and education, and taste, and virtue are to be more and more a part and parcel of public procedure.

We are near the end of the time when men will talk to us about *isms*. I have lived to see the day when Grace church has preached politics; and I am prepared to say, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." (Great applause.) We have seen the time when humanity was so ostracised and was so vagabond that no man that valued his reputation, or his life even, dared to preach it. But that time has gone. The sepulchre is open, and the Christ has come out, and is a living Saviour; and no man now, rolling the door back, can again shut in the Saviour of the world. It is too late. He has flown. And those regal ideas that struggle for liberty have come forth, and spread their wings to soar high, and yet brood low over all the nations, and you shall never get them back; and the time is coming when they will take such proportions as we do not now suspect. And the men that pray out of grog-shops, and out of *Heralds*, and such like newspapers, and

fear that the sacred garments of religion will be soiled by those who in the pulpit dabble with politics—let them prepare themselves, for there is to be more dabbling with politics than they ever saw before in all their lives. (Great laughter and applause.)

In such a state of society, then, as the present, I stand, as I have said, on far higher ground in arguing this question than the right of woman. That I believe in; but that is down in the justice's court. I go to the supreme bench and argue it, and argue it on the ground that the nation needs woman, and that woman needs the nation, and that woman can never become what she should be, and the nation can never become what it should be, until there is no distinction made between the sexes as regards the rights and duties of citizenship—until we come to the 28th verse of the third chapter of Galatians:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

And when that day comes; when the heavenly kingdom is ushered in with its myriad blessed influences; when the sun of righteousness shall fill the world with its beams, as the natural sun, coming from the far South, fills the earth with glorious colors and beauty; then it will come to pass that there shall be no nationality, no difference of classes, and no difference of sexes. Then all shall be one in Christ Jesus.

I urge, then, that woman should perform the duty of a citizen in voting. You may, perhaps, ask, before I go any further, "What is the use of preaching to us that we *ought* to do it, when we are *not permitted* to do it?" That day in which the intelligent, cultivated women of America say, "We have a right to the ballot," will be the day in which they will have it. (Voices—"Yes." "That is so.") There is no power on earth that can keep it from them. (Applause.) The reason you have not voted is because you have not

wanted to. (Applause.) It is because you have not felt that it was your duty to vote. You have felt yourselves to be secure and happy enough in your privileges and prerogatives, and have left the great mass of your sisters, that shed tears and bore burdens, to shirk for themselves. You have felt that you had rights more than you wanted now. O yes, it is as if a beauty in Fifth avenue, hearing one plead that bread might be sent to the hungry and famishing, should say, "What is this talk about bread for? I have as much bread as I want, and plenty of sweatmeats, and I do not want your loaves." Shall one that is glutted with abundance despise the wants of the starving, who are so far below them that they do not hear their cries, not one of which escapes the ear of Almighty God? Because you have wealth, and knowledge, and loving parents, or a faithful husband, or kind brothers, and you feel no pressure of need, do you feel no inward pressure of humanity for others? Is there no part of God's great work in providence that should lead you to be discontented with your ease and privileges until you are enfranchised? You ought to vote; and when your understanding and intellect are convinced that you ought to do it, you will have the power to do it; and you never will till then.

I. Woman has more interest than man in the promotion of virtue and purity and humanity. Half, shall I say?—Half does not half measure the proportion of those sorrows that come upon woman by reason of her want of influence and power. All the young men that, breaking down, break fathers' and mothers' hearts; all those that struggle near to the grave, weeping piteous tears of blood, it might almost be said, and that at last, under paroxysms of despair, sin against nature, and are swept out of misery into damnation; the spectacles that fill our cities, and afflict and torment villages—what are these but reasons that summon woman to have a part in that regenerating of thought and that regenerating of legislation which shall make vice a

crime, and vice-makers criminals? Do you suppose that, if it were to turn on the votes of women to-day whether rum should be sold in every shop in this city, there would be one moment's delay in settling the question? What to the oak lightning is, that marks it and descends swiftly upon it, that woman's vote would be to miscreant vices in these great cities. (Applause.)

Ah, I speak that which I do know. As a physician speaks from that which he sees in the hospital where he ministers, so I speak from that which I behold in my professional position and place, where I see the undercurrent of life. I hear groans that come from smiling faces. I witness tears that when others look upon the face are all swept away, as the rain is when one comes after a storm. Not most vocal are our deepest sorrows. Oh, the sufferings of wives for husbands untrue! Oh, the sufferings of mothers for sons led astray! Oh, the sufferings of sisters for sisters gone! Oh, the sufferings of companions for companion-women desecrated! And I hold it to be a shame that they, who have the instinct of purity and of divine remedial mercy more than any other, should withhold their hand from that public legislation by which society may be scoured, and its pests cleared away. And I declare that woman has more interest in legislation than man, because she is the sufferer and the home-staying, ruined victim.

II. The household, about which we hear so much said as being woman's sphere, is safe only as the community around about it is safe. Now and then there may be a Lot that can live in Sodom; but when Lot was called to emigrate, he could not get all his children to go with him. They had been intermarried and corrupted. A Christian woman is said to have all that she needs for her understanding and to task her powers if she will stay at home and mend her husband's clothes, if she has a husband, and take care of her children, if she has children. The welfare of the family, it is said, ought to occupy her time and thoughts. And

some ministers, in descanting upon the sphere of woman, are wont to magnify the glory and beauty of a mother teaching some future chief-justice or some president of the United States. Not one whit of glory would I withdraw from such a canvas as that; but I aver that the power to teach these children largely depends upon the influences that surround the household; so that she that would take the best care of the house must take care of the atmosphere which is around the house as well. And every true and wise Christian woman is bound to have a thought for the village, for the county, for the State, and for the nation. (Applause.)

That was not the kind of woman that brought me up—a woman that never thought of anything outside of her own door-yard. My mother's house was as wide as Christ's house; and she taught me to understand the words of him that said, "The field is the world; and whoever needs is your brother." A woman that is content to wash stockings, and make Johnny-cake, and to look after and bring up her boys faultless to a button, and that never thinks beyond the meal-tub, and whose morality is so small as to be confined to a single house, is an under-grown woman, and will spend the first thousand years after death in coming to that state in which she ought to have been before she died. (Laughter.) Tell me that a woman is fit to give an ideal life to an American citizen, to enlarge his sympathies, to make him wise in judgment, and to establish him in patriotic regard, who has no thought above what to eat and drink, and wherewithal to be clothed. The best housekeepers are they that are the most widely beneficent. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." God will take care of the stockings, if you will take care of the heads! (Laughter and applause.) Universal beneficence never hinders anybody's usefulness in any particular field of duty. Therefore, woman's sphere should not be limited to the

household. The public welfare requires that she should have a thought of affairs outside of the household, and in the whole community.

III. Woman brings to public affairs peculiar qualities, aspirations, and affections which society needs. I have had persons say to me, "Would you, now, take your daughter and your wife, and walk down to the polls with them?" If I were to take my daughter and my wife, and walk down to the polls with them, and there was a squirming crowd of bloated, loud-mouthed, blattering men, wrangling like so many maggots on cheese, what would take place, but that, at the moment I appeared with my wife and daughter walking by my side with conscious dignity and veiled modesty, the lane would open, and I should pass through the red sea unharmed? (Great applause.) Where is there a mob such that the announcement that a woman is present, does not bring down the loudest of them? Nothing but the sorcery of rum prevents a man from paying unconscious, instant respect to the presence of a woman.

I am asked, "Would you take your wife and daughter into the vulgarity of politics?" Now, to take your wife and daughter into the vulgarity of politics is to cleanse politics of its vulgarity. (Applause.) Politics is vulgar, because you are not there, woman; and that is one of the reasons why you must be there. You may surround the polls with as many inspectors of election as the room would hold, and station a line of policemen or military all the way from the door to the ballot-box, and corruption will creep through them; but put a revered mother, a beloved wife, or an honored sister there, and corruption will look upon them, and veil its face, and pass on. (Applause.) It is the presence of woman in public affairs, actuated by a high sense of duty, and befriended and co-operated with by man, that allays corruption, wards off insult, and brings peace where was strife and struggle. And, therefore, I say, Politics is as the poor wretch that called out to the

Master, "Art thou come to torment me before my time," when woman approaches it. And a voice shall yet be heard saying, "I command thee to come out of it." And the devil will cast it on the ground, and tear it, and it will wallow foaming, and the devil will come out of it, and it will be worth twenty times more without a devil than with a devil in it. (Applause.)

IV. The history of woman's co-operative labors thus far justifies the most sanguine anticipations, such as I have alluded to. Allusion has been made to the purification of literature. The influence of woman has been a part of the cause of this, unquestionably; but I would not ascribe such a result to any one cause. God is a great workman, and has a chest full of tools, and never uses one tool, but always many; and in the purification of literature, the elevation of thought, the advancement of the public sentiment of the world in humanity, God has employed more than that which has been wrought in their departments. And that which the church has long ago achieved for herself, that which the family has achieved—that, in more eminence and more wondrous and surprising beauty, the world will achieve for itself in public affairs, when man and woman co-operate there, as now they are co-operating in all other spheres of taste, intellection and morality.

Let me now pass, without touching upon some other points which I had marked, to a consideration of a few of the objections that are made to woman's mixing in public affairs as a voter and as a citizen.

I. It is said, "A woman's place is at home." Well, now, since compromises are coming into vogue again, will you compromise with me, and agree that until a woman has a home she may vote? (Laughter.) That is only fair. It is said, "She ought to stay at home, and attend to home duty, and minister to the wants of father, or husband, or brothers." Well, may all orphan women, and unmarried women, and women that have no abiding place of residence

vote? If not, where is the argument? But, to look at it seriously, what is the defect of this statement? It is the impression that staying at home is incompatible with going abroad. Never was there a more monstrous fallacy. I light my candle, and it gives me all the light I want, and it gives all the light you want to you, and to you, and to you, and to every other one in the room; and there is not one single ray that you get there which cheats me here; and a woman that is doing her duty right in the family, sheds a beneficent influence out upon the village in which she dwells, without taking a moment's more time.

My cherry-trees are joyful in all their blossoms, and thousands go by them and see them in their beauty day by day; but I never mourn the happiness that they bestow on passers-by as having been taken from me. I am not cheated by the perfume that goes from my flowers into my neighbor's yard. And the character of a true woman is such that it may shine everywhere without making her any poorer. She is richer in proportion as she gives away. (Applause.) It is that which you give away that you keep. It is that which you keep that can never do any good to yourselves or others. It is that which you give away that bounds back and makes you stronger.

Why, I set a candle in my window in the country, that they who come up the lane may see how to drive and reach my house, and clear down to the road that modest candle sheds its light; but does it cheat me? Does it fail to do its work inside because it sends its long line of light outside? Some men seem to think that, if woman should get the rights that she is clamoring for, she would do nothing but put a reticule on her arm, and start out every morning with a bundle of tracts, discussing all manner of questions. Oh no, she is not a man! If she were a man she would go about with noisy inefficiency, buzzing and bustling, and making a great ado about nothing; but, being a woman, she goes about what she has to do, and does it so quietly as

scarcely to be noticed. And is she not a skilful manager? Does she not know how to give up and conquer? Does she not know how to touch the subtle springs of action? Has she not the element of foresight? It is called "tact." I do not care what you call it; it is blessed. For next to having your own way, is thinking that you have it. (Laughter.) Some of the sweetest experiences of my life were when my father, who was two-thirds a woman—a woman with man's enamel on—took my side when I meant to go to sea, and made it all so plain and right that, when I came to the point of deciding, I did not want to go, and all trouble was avoided. If he had whipped me, and shut me up, and scolded me, I should have gone away; and I do not know where I should have been buried—somewhere. Woman has that peculiar quality of doing much while she talks little. Her life is largely in the sphere of spiritual unembodied power. She works with the fewest instruments, and the least noise possible, and avoids observation; while man works with all the instrumentation at his command, and makes the greatest possible amount of noise and clatter. And it is just because woman is woman that she is fitted, while she takes care of the household, to take care of the village and the community around about her.

II. It is said, "It will destroy woman's delicacy if she goes into politics." Certainly, if she goes into partnership with some politicians. One base politician is corruption enough to spoil a whole village; and I would not have her innoculated with it for the world. But I do not propose that she should change her sex. I would a great deal rather have a man that was born a man than a woman that has become a man. Unsexing is poor business. I have seen men that tried to be women; and women that tried to be men; and commend me to women that are women by nature, and men that are men by nature, and to no mixture. (Applause.) If you come into public affairs with the same kind of ratiocinative force that men do, you will be no better

there than men; but if you do not divest yourself of those intuitions of the moral sense, and that foresight, that tact, which you employ in other spheres, then your presence there will be more fruitful of good than men's. It is to bring these things into the place of the coarser instrumentations of politics that I want you to be a woman more than ever. And, if there be sweetness on the tongue, let it ring like a silver bell. If there be mildness in the eye, let it not give place to fierce zeal. If there be melody of the heart, let it charm away that which is bad in public affairs. It is *as a woman* that you are summoned to take part in those affairs. If you lay aside the woman, then you are not needed. It is to get another sort of influence in public affairs that we plead for woman's entrance there.

But it is said, "She ought to act through her father, or husband, or son." Why ought she? Did you ever frame an argument to show why the girl should use her father to vote for her, and the boy who is younger, and not half so witty, should vote for himself? It does not admit of an argument. If the grandmother, the mother, the wife, and the eldest daughter, are to be voted for by the father, the husband, and the eldest brother, then why are not the children to be voted for in complete family relation by the patriarchal head? Why not go back to the tribal custom of the desert, and let the patriarch do all the voting? To be sure, it would change the whole form of our government; but, if it is good for the family, it is just as good for classes. I should like to see one man go to another and claim the right to vote for him. Suppose I should go to men that are working for me, and say, "Boys, you are nothing but workmen, and I am the owner of a fancy farm, which I pay roundly for, and you ought to let me vote for you; tell me what you want, and I will take it into consideration." There would be as much reason in this as there is in the argument that woman ought not to vote because her husband or father can vote for her.

In a frontier settlement is a log cabin, and it is in a region which is infested by wolves. There are in the family a broken-down patient of a man, a mother, and three daughters. The house is surrounded by a pack of these voracious animals, and the inmates feel that their safety requires that the intruders should be driven away. There are three or four rifles in the house. The man creeps to one of the windows, and to the mother and daughter it is said, "You load the rifles, and hand them to me, and let me fire them." But they can load all the four rifles, and he cannot fire half as fast as they can load; and I say to the mother, "Can you shoot?" She says, "Let me try;" and she takes a gun, and points it at the wolves, and pulls the trigger, and I see one of them throw his feet up in the air. "Ah!" I say, "I see you can shoot! You keep the rifle, and fire it yourself." And I say to the oldest daughter, "Can you shoot?" "I guess I can," she says. "Well, dare you?" "I dare do anything to save father and the family." And she takes one of the rifles, and pops over another of the pack. And I tell you, if the wolves knew that all the women were firing, they would flee from that cabin instanter. (Laughter.) I do not object to a woman loading a man's rifle and letting him shoot; but I say that, if there are two rifles, she ought to load one of them and shoot herself. And I do not see any use of a woman's influencing a man, and loading him with a vote, and letting him go and fire it off at the ballot-box. (Laughter and applause.)

It is said, again, "Woman is a creature of such an excitable nature that, if she were to mingle with men in public affairs, it would introduce a kind of vindictive acrimony, and politics would become intolerable." O, if I really thought so, if I thought that the purity of politics would be sullied, I would not say another word! (Laughter.) I do not want to take anything from the celestial graces of politics! (Renewed laughter.) I want Fernando Wood and the aldermen of New York to understand that I

would not on any account demoralize politics; and, if I believed that bringing our mothers and wives and daughters into politics would have a tendency to lower its moral tone in the slightest degree, I would give up the argument. (Laughter and applause.) I will admit that woman is an excitable creature, and I will admit that politics needs no more excitement; but sometimes, you know, things are homœopathic. A woman's excitement is apt to put out a man's; and if she should bring her excitability into politics, it is likely that it would neutralize the excitement already there, and that there would be a grand peace! (Laughter.)

But, not to trifle with it, woman is excitable. Woman is yet to be educated. Woman is yet to experience the reactionary influence of being a public legislator and thinker. And let her sphere be extended beyond the family and the school, so that she should be interested in, and actively engaged in promoting the welfare of the whole community, and in the course of three generations the reaction on her would be such that the excitement she would bring into public affairs would be almost purely moral inspiration. It would be the excitement of purity and disinterested benevolence. And this excitement we need. For, although men decry excitement, and enthusiasm, and fanaticism, that cause which has not enthusiasm in it is dead, and ought to be buried; and only that cause has regency and potency which has in it just that excitement, indomitable, far-reaching, and purifying, which comes from man's and woman's moral instincts. And I would to God that we could have a little more of such enthusiasm and fanaticism in politics. (Applause.)

It is said, furthermore, "Woman might vote for herself, and take office." Why not? A woman makes as good a postmistress as a man does postmaster. Woman has been tried in every office from the throne to the position of the humblest servant; and where has she been found remiss? I believe that multitudes of the offices that are held by men

are mere excuses for leading an effeminate life; and that with their superior physical strength it behooves them better to be actors out of doors, where the severity of climate and the elements is to be encountered, and leave indoor offices to women, to whom they more properly belong.

But, women, you are not educated for these offices. I hear bad reports of you. It is told me that the trouble in giving places to women is that they will not do their work well; that they do not feel the sense of conscience. They have been flattered so long, they have been called "women" so long, they have had compliments instead of rights so long, that they are spoiled; but when a generation of young women shall have been educated to a stern sense of right and duty, and shall take no compliments at the expense of right, we shall have no such complaints as these. And when a generation of women, working with the love of God and true patriotism in their souls, shall have begun to hold office, meriting it, and being elected to it by those that would rather have a woman than a man in office, then you may depend upon it that education has qualified them for the trusts which are committed to them. We have tried "old women" in office, and I am convinced that it would be better to have *real* women than virile old women in public stations. (Laughter and applause.) For my own sake, give me a just, considerate, true, straight-forward, honest-minded, noble-hearted woman, who has been able, in the fear of God, to bring up six boys in the way they should go, and settle them in life. If there is anything harder in this nation than that, tell me what it is. A woman that can bring up a family of strong-brained children, and make good citizens of them, can be President without any difficulty. (Applause.)

Let me now close with one single thought in connection with this objection. I protest in the name of my country-women against the aspersion which is cast upon them by those who say that woman is not fit to hold office or dis-

charge public trusts. The name of what potentate to-day, if you go round the world, would probably, in every nation on the earth, bring down most enthusiasm and public approbation? If I now, here in your midst, shall mention the name of Queen Victoria, your cheers will be a testimony to your admiration of this noble woman. (Great applause.) Though it be in a political meeting, or any other public gathering, no man can mention her name without eliciting enthusiastic tokens of respect. And yet, the same men that cheer her will go home, and put on their spectacles, and argue that woman ought not to hold office? Was there ever a nobler specimen of woman than the Duchess of Sutherland? And is there a nobler woman than her daughter, the Duchess of Argyle—a friend to our cause, and one who our Minister, Mr. Adams, told me knew more of public affairs than he did? There are state occasions when she must stand in Parliament with her queen, and perform appropriate public duties; and who ever thought that in her doing it there was any derogation of her sex? Who ever thought that a duchess in France, or a queen in Russia, or an empress in Austria, or any aristocratic woman, was unsexed or demeaned by occupying a high position under the government?

It is a controversy to-day between woman aristocratic and woman democratic (applause); and I claim that what it is right for an aristocratic woman to do—what it is right for a duchess, or a queen, or an empress to do—it is right for the simplest and plainest of my countrywomen to do, that has no title, and no credentials, except the fact that God made her a woman. All that I claim for the proudest aristocrat I claim for all other women. (Applause.) I do not object to a woman's being a queen, or a president, if she has the qualifications which fit her to be one. And I claim that, where there is a woman that has the requisite qualifications for holding any office in the family, in the church, or in the State, there is no reason why she should not be

allowed to hold it. And we shall have a perfect crystal idea of the State, with all its contents, only when man understands the injunction, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." (Great applause.)

REMARKS BY MR. BEECHER,

AT THE

FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE

AMERICAN EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION,

NEW YORK, MAY 10, 1867.

I COME here to-day to bear my testimony, not as if I had not already done it, but again, as confirmed by all that I have read, whether of things written in England or spoken in America, in the belief that this movement is not the mere progeny of a fitful and feverish Ism—that it is not a mere frothing eddy whose spirit is but the chafing of the water upon the rock—but that it is a part of that great tide which follows the drawing of heaven itself. I believe it to be so.

All my lifetime the great trouble has been that in merely speculative things theologians have been such furious logicians, have picked up their premises, and rushed with them with race-horse speed to such remote conclusions, that in the region of ideas our logical minds have become accustomed to draw results as remote as the very eternities from any premises given. My difficulty, on the other hand, has been that, in practical matters, owing to the existence of this great mephitic swamp of slavery, men have been utterly unwilling to draw conclusions at all; and that the most familiar principles of political economy or politics have been enunciated, and then always docked off short. Men would not allow them to go to their natural results, in the class of questions in society. We have had raised up before us the

necessity of maintaining the Union by denying conclusions. The most dear and sacred and animating principles of religion have been restrained, because they would have such a bearing upon slavery, and men felt bound to hold their peace. Our most profound and broadly acknowledged principles of liberty have been enunciated and passed over, without carrying them out and applying them to society, because it would interrupt the peace of the nation. That time is passed away; and as the result of it, has come in a joy and a perfect appetite on the part of the public.

I have been a careful observer for more than thirty-five years, for I came into public life, I believe, about the same time with the lady who has just sat down (Mrs. Abby Kelley Foster), although I am not so much worn by my labors as she seems to have been. For thirty-five years I have observed in society its impetus checked, and a kind of lethargy and deadness in practical ethics arising, from fear of this prejudicial effect upon public economy. I have noticed that in the last five years there has been a revolution as perfect as if it had been God's resurrection in the graveyard. The dead men are living, and the live men are thrice alive. I can scarcely express my sense of the leap the public mind and the public moral sense have taken within this time. The barrier is out of the way. That which made the American mind untrue logically to itself is smitten down by the hand of God; and there is just at this time an immense tendency in the public mind to carry out all principles to their legitimate conclusions, go where they will. There never was a time when men were so practical, and so ready to learn. I am not a farmer, but I know that the spring comes but once in the year. When the furrow is open is the time to put in your seed, if you would gather a harvest in its season. Now, when the red-hot ploughshare of war has opened a furrow in this nation, is the time to put in the seed. If any man says to me, "Why will you agitate the woman's question, when it is the hour for the black man?" I an-

swer, it is the hour for every man, black or white. (Applause.) The bees go out in the morning to gather the honey from the morning-glories. They take it when they are open, for by ten o'clock they are shut, and they never open again. When the public mind is open, if you have anything to say, say it. If you have any radical principles to urge, any organizing wisdom to make known, don't wait until quiet times come. Don't wait until the public mind shuts up altogether.

War has opened the way for impulse to extend itself. And progress goes by periods, by jumps and spurts. We are in the favored hour; and if you have great principles to make known, this is the time to advance those principles. If you can organize them into institutions, this is the time to organize them. I therefore say, whatever truth is to be known for the next fifty years in this nation let it be spoken now—let it be enforced now.

The truth that I have to urge is not that women have the right of suffrage—not that Chinamen or Irishmen have the right of suffrage—not that native born Yankees have the right of suffrage—but that *suffrage is the inherent right of mankind.* I say that man has the right of suffrage as I say that man has the right to himself. For although it may not be true under the Russian government, where the government does not rest on the people, and although under our own government a man has not a right to himself, except in accordance with the spirit and action of our own institutions, yet our institutions make the government depend on the people, and make the people depend on the government; and no man is a full citizen, or fully competent to take care of himself, or to defend himself, that has not all those rights that belong to his fellows. I therefore advocate no sectional rights, no class rights, no sex rights; but the most universal form of rights for all that live and breathe on the continent. I do not put back the black man's emancipation; nor do I put back for a single day or

for an hour his admission. I ask not that he should wait. I demand that this work shall be done, not upon the ground that it is politically expedient now to enfranchise black men; but I propose that you take expediency out of the way, and that you put a principle that is more enduring than expediency in the place of it—manhood and womanhood suffrage for all.

That is the question. You may just as well meet it now as at any other time. You never will have so favorable an occasion, so sympathetic a heart, never a public reason so willing to be convinced as to-day. If anything is to be done for the black man, or the black woman, or for the disfranchised classes among the whites, let it be done, in the name of God, while his Providence says, "Come; come all, and come welcome."

But I take wisdom from some with whom I have not always trained. If you would get ten steps, has been the practical philosophy of some who are not here to-day, demand twenty, and then you will get ten. Now even if I were to confine—as I by no means do—my expectation to gaining the vote for the black man, I think we should be much more likely to gain that by demanding the vote for everybody. I remember that when I was a boy Dr. Spurzheim came to this country to advocate phrenology, but everybody held up both hands—"Phrenology! You must be running mad to have the idea that phrenology can be true!" It was not long after, that mesmerism came along; and then the people said, "Mesmerism! We can go phrenology; there is some sense in that; but as for mesmerism—!" Very soon spiritualism made its appearance, and then the same people began to say, "Spiritualism! why it is nothing but mesmerism; we can believe in that; but as for spiritualism—!" (Laughter.) The way to get a man to take a position is to take one in advance of it, and then he will drop into the one you want him to take. So that if, being crafty, I desire to catch men with guile, and desire

them to adopt suffrage for colored men, as good a trap as I know of is to claim it for women also. Bait your trap with the white woman, and I think you will catch the black man. (Laughter.) I would not, certainly, have it understood that we are standing here to advocate this universal application of the principle merely to secure the enfranchisment of the colored citizen. We do it in good faith. I believe it is just as easy to carry the enfranchisement of all as the enfranchisment of any class, and easier to carry it than carry the enfranchisment of class after class—class after class. (Applause.)

I make this demand because I have the deepest sense of what is before us. We have entered upon an era such as never before has come to any nation. We are at a point in the history of the world where we need a prophet, and have none to describe to us those events rising in the horizon, thick and fast. Sometimes it seems to me that the Latter Day glory which the prophets dimly saw, and which saints have ever since, with faintness of heart, longed for and prayed for with wavering faith, is just before us. I see the fountains of the great deep broken up. I think we are to have a nation born in a day among us, greater in power of thought, greater in power of conscience, greater therefore in self-government, greater still in the power of material development. Such thrift, such skill, such enterprise, such power of self-sustentation I think is about to be developed, to say nothing of the advance already made before the nations, as will surprise even the most sanguine and far-sighted.

Nevertheless, while so much is promised, there are all the attendant evils. It is a serious thing to bring unwashed, uncombed, untutored men, scarcely redeemed from savagery to the ballot-box. It is a dangerous thing to bring the foreigner, whose whole secular education was under the throne of the tyrant, and put his hand upon the helm of affairs in this free nation. It is a dangerous thing to bring

mer without property, or the expectation of it, into the legislative halls to legislate upon property. It is a dangerous thing to bring woman, unaccustomed to and undrilled in the art of government, suddenly into the field to vote. These are dangerous things; I admit it. But I think God says to us, "By that danger I put every man of you under the solemn responsibility of preparing these persons effectually for their citizenship." Are you a rich man, afraid of your money? By that fear you are called to educate the men who you are afraid will vote against you. We are in a time of danger. I say to the top of society, just as sure as you despise the bottom, you shall be left like the oak tree that rebelled against its own roots—better that it be struck with lightning. Take a man from the top of society or the bottom, and if you will but give himself to himself, give him his reason, his moral nature, and his affections; take him with all his passions and his appetites, and develop him, and you will find he has the same instinct for self-government that you have. God made a man just as much to govern himself as a pyramid to stand on its own bottom. Self-government is a boon intended for all. This is shown in the very organization of the human mind, with its counterbalances and checks. It certainly will be given to all; and I am not afraid that all should have it, provided they are unbound, developed to more liberty, and made more familiar with themselves. If those who are up in the privileged seats are afraid of those at the bottom, then turn to and become school-teachers. Go to work and teach them.

For my own part, I do not despise the lowly. I thank God for them, as I thank God for those who repose on their literary laurels. My heart warms for everything God makes, whether worm or insect—whether it flies in the air, or swims in the sea, or walks upon the earth, and surely for everything that carries immortality in its bosom. My heart warms for those who have touched the summer of

prosperity. They are my natural fellows; and if I sought simply congeniality, with them would I walk. But when brought into that other state of benevolence, which penetrated the bosom of the Saviour, then they who are not favored are more the objects of my concern. Then do I labor more willingly and more earnestly for the fallen and the oppressed, that I may lift them up. Nor do I know any Christianity in this age of the world which does not give its broad shoulders with patient strength, always lifting —lifting—those that need some other than their own strength, to raise them up to the place where God designed them to live. In this spirit there is no antagonism between the favored classes and the unfavored. We are underpinning and undergirding society. Let us put under it no political expediency, but the great principle of manhood and womanhood, not merely cheating ourselves by a partial measure, but carrying the nation forward to its great and illustrious future, in which it will enjoy more safety, more dignity, more sublime proportions, and a health that will know no death. (Applause.)

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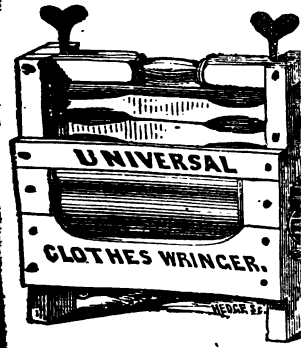

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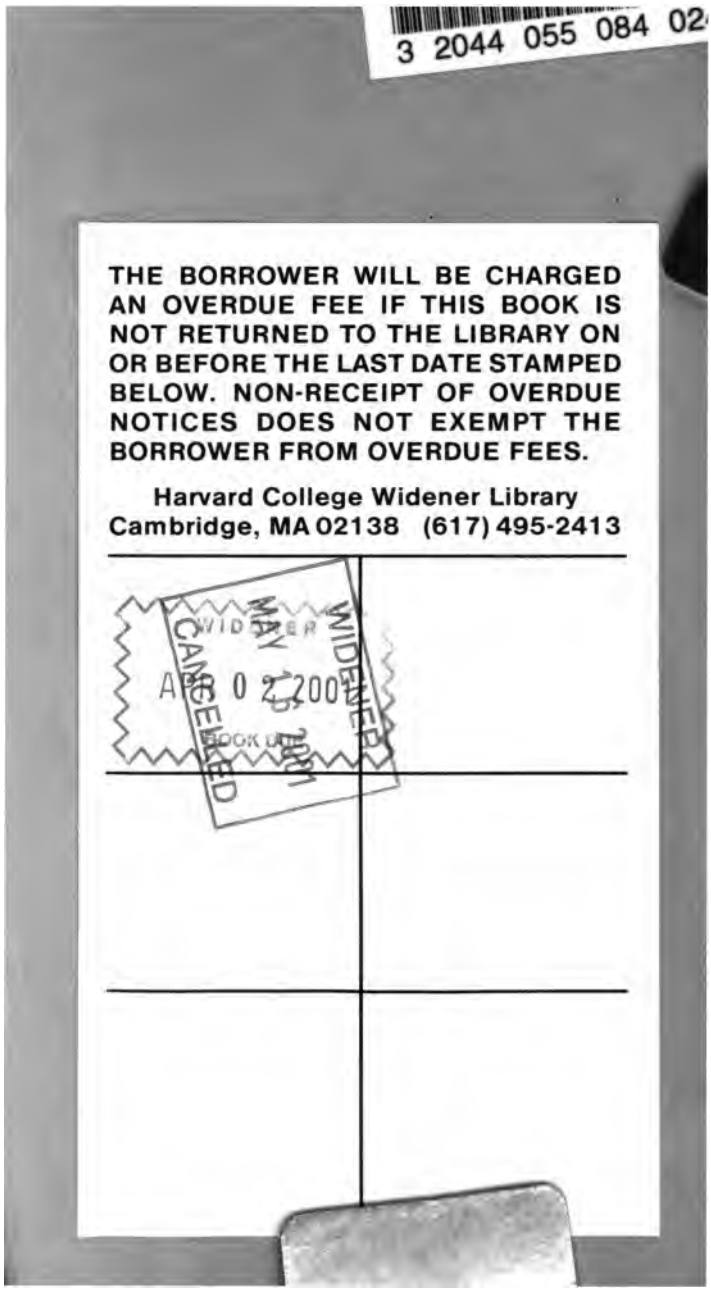
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